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ABSTRACT

The central problem of the study was to determine the English competencies required of secretaries in the Medical, Legal and Administrative Secretarial Areas. The questionnaire/interview method was employed, utilizing 50 questionnaires and ten interviews in each of the three secretarial areas, and distributing them to imployers and employees according to a radial density corresponding to the employment density of graduates of Western Wisconsin Technical Institute. The respondents and interviewees overwhelmingly ascribed primary importance to knowledge of fundamentals of English, and further indicated that these competencies were the responsibility of the educator, not the employer. The study concludes that while the tendency in English education is toward making it fun and eliminating the stresses inherent in the more traditional approaches, it is 180 degrees off from what the employer wants. It is suggested that the long-term happiness and satisfaction derived from successful competition in the world of work is more desirable than the short-term happiness of non-competitive educational interlude. (Author/DS)

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FINAL REPORT

Project No. 02-036-151-212

AN EXAMINATION TO DETERMINE THE ENGLISH COMPETENCIES REQUIRED OF SECRETARIES IN THE ADMINISTRATIVE, LEGAL AND MEDICAL AREAS WITH A SYNTHESIS INTO A CORE OF COMMON COMPETENCIES TO BE USED IN FORMING A BASIS FOR AN ENGLISH CURRICULUM

May 1973

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ABSTRACT

The central problem of the study was to determine the English competencies required of secretaries in the Medical, Legal and Administrative Secretarial Areas. The questionnaire/interview method was employed, utilizing 50 questionnaires and ten interviews in each of the three secretarial areas, and distributing them to employers and employees according to a radial density corresponding to the employment density of graduates of Western Wisconsin Technical Institute.

The respondents and interviewees overwhelmingly ascribed primary importance to knowledge of the fundamentals of English (grammar, spelling and vocabulary), and further indicated that these competencies were the responsibility of the educator, not the employer. The study also indicated a very strong desire for a return to the "work ethic."

The study concludes that while the tendency in English education toward making it "fun" and eliminating the stresses inherent in the more traditional approaches may be pleasing to today's social theorist, it is 180 degrees off from what the employer wants. Therefore it is suggested that the long-term happiness and satisfaction derived from successful competition in the world of work is more desirable than the short-term happiness of a stress-free, non-competitive educational interlude, and that employability enhancing approaches be stressed.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

The central problem of the study was to determine the English competencies required of secretaries in the medical, legal and administrative secretarial areas. This study was designed to provide a synthesis of these requirements forming a core of common competencies to be used as a basis for an English curriculum in the vocational/technical school. It was anticipated that the study would be of value to educators in the vocational/technical field generally, if not for its specific content, possibly for its approach and methodology.

Objectives

The objectives of the study were:

1. To implement a survey and utilize interviews and thereby determine the English competencies required of secretaries in the medical, legal and administrative areas.
2. To synthesize required English competencies of secretaries into a core of competencies common to the medical, legal and administrative secretarial fields.
3. To transpose the English competencies of secretaries into an employment enhancing approach that could be utilized by the curriculum

planner in developing an English curriculum for secretarial students in the vocational/technical school.

Scope and Limitations

First, the study did not attempt to arrive at conclusions beyond the scope of the secretarial English course in the three areas. Overlapping into other areas such as social studies and other major areas was avoided. There was also an effort to avoid overlapping into nonrelevant parts of the English area generally. As will be further elaborated in the Rationale and Review of Literature, the approach was based primarily on the concept of an applied English curriculum tailored primarily for the purpose of enhancing the student's employability or upgrading in the secretarial field.

The population sampled was derived from the radial densities of the most recent placement map for Western Wisconsin Technical Institute (W.W.T.I.) (See Appendix A). Thus, a significant limitation to the study emerges: The sampling of the questionnaires and interviews was derived from the W.W.T.I. employment radius, and therefore, inferences made from the study to a greater area or any other area must necessarily be considered as less valid than these inferences that can be made within the survey area. The reasons for limiting the study's scope to one vocational/technical school's area are at least two-fold: First, there was the matter of administrative feasibility--there simply were not enough resources or time to travel outside of District Two. Secondly, there was the desire to furnish the originating institution with the most valid and reliable input possible, so that the institution could furnish its employers, the taxpayers, with employees who had the benefit of courses tailored to the actual, real world requirements of jobs in the school's employment radius.

Review of Literature and Rationale

As the vocational/technical school has undergone the change in function and image from that of a refuge for the student with learning disabilities and social adjustment problems to that of a viable and socially acceptable alternative to the four-year college, a problem of many dimensions has arisen. What is the role of general education in this changed and changing institution? And more specifically, to approach the subject of this study, what is the role of the English course? Are vocational/technical schools to develop an articulate mechanic or an articulate citizen--do we educate the person as the worker or the total person? There is no black-white distinction to be made, but rather a search for the right shade of grey. There seems to be a consensus in the Wisconsin vocational/technical system that the content of general education courses should hover closer to the applied than the theoretical. Among general education courses, the English offerings are somewhat freer of this problem--that is to educate the worker or the total person, than, some other courses in the social studies area. The English instructor concerned with finding the right direction to appropriate relevance should understand that communication deals with form and method rather than specific content. It is the vessel that conveys rather than the content which is conveyed. There is perhaps some justification in the English instructor concluding that if he has trained an effective business communicator, he has most likely instilled a greater capacity for communication in every phase of the total person's existence.

It was assumed that the English curriculum planner, in defining and establishing course objectives, should direct his energies toward that which best enhances the student's capability in his major area without neglecting his obligation to develop the total person.

The "relevance to job" approach was the basis for the studies referred to in this review of literature and rationale. The researchers did not attempt to determine whether or not the subject should be relevant to the job; rather, they sought the best way to achieve relevance.

The first study consulted was a Master's Thesis done by Harold P. Erickson at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse. This study dealt with the English needs of the technician and how they might best be met by the technical school. The study concluded that the technician's English program, after basic skills, should be strongly oriented toward oral and written reports on technical subject matter. It further stressed that a close relationship should exist between the technician's English courses and his major area.[1]

An approach that initially seems to disagree with the applied aspect of general education curricula was found in a Doctoral Study done by JoAnne Mae Brenholt. While initially this research seems to disagree with the practical approach to an English curriculum, its goal is actually the same: "... it was found that the majority of the post secondary schools have been concentrating on a narrow and vocational kind of training which, though it may help the student obtain his first job, is likely to handicap him in adjusting to higher-level positions."[2] Thus, her advocacy of broader general education courses was basically a job-oriented approach in contrast to the "art for art's sake" approach of so many advocates of a liberal arts emphasis.

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[1]Harold P. Erickson, "An Effective English Program for the Technical School," (unpublished Master's Thesis, University of Wisconsin-La Crosse, December, 1967).

[2]JoAnne Mae Brenholt, "An Evaluative Study of the Impact on General Education of Selected One- and Two-Year Terminal Post-secondary Business Curricula in Eight Western States," (unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, University of Montana, 1970), page 198.

A Master's Thesis by Catherine Lake proved to be of value in its approach as well as its content. Her study indicated that the employer considered speaking skills to be a significant factor in the desirability of a potential employee and the capability of the employed. Further, it indicated a desire for courses that enhanced the student's ability to present and handle technical data and cope with everyday procedural speaking situations. The study provided little information in regard to handling extremely structured speaking situations, such as the ability to chair a meeting according to Robert's rules.[3]

Everett E. Walde, Communication Skills Department Head at District One Technical Institute, Eau Claire, Wisconsin, in a Master's Thesis, attempted to ascertain the effectiveness of communication skills courses for students in all areas. The following data from his study proved to be of distinct value in determining the approach this study should take:

> In the use of writing skills, it was reported that 50% of the respondents spend time in writing order forms or reports, and 24% are involved in preparing interoffice memorandums. The need for good writing habits was also revealed in the former students' feelings of inadequacy. The response in this section revealed that 25% or more of the respondents felt inadequate in the correct use of punctuation and in business letter writing. The responses from the employers show even more concern in the area of writing. Inadequacies of former students in business letter writing were found by 60% of the employers, and inadequacies in preparing reports were found by 36% of the employers.
>
> The suggestions for improving the course also support the findings of inadequacies and the present use of communication skills in the writing area. Above 25% of the responses from both former students and employers indicated that more sentence and paragraph structure, spelling, punctuation, and grammar should be added to the course in communication skills. About one third of the

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[3]Catherine Lake, "What's Needed in Technician's Speech Education?" Technical Education, September, 1970, TE5.

employers also felt that a research paper in the student's major area area would be beneficial.[4]

Another study done by an instructor in Mr. Walde's department, Mrs. Roberta P. Lewis, was of particular interest because she chose to analyze the communication skills vocational or one-year student. Her recommendations and conclusions were:

> 1. The ability to read and comprehend is the most important area of communication for the vocational student. The present time programmed for reading in the course of study should be increased slightly (5 percent).
> 2. Of almost equal importance to the vocational student are the listening skills. The time presently given to these skills should be increased from 11 percent to 35 percent of the total time given to a course of study.
> 3. Writing and speaking skills are of less importance to the vocational student. The percentage of time given to writing in the course should be reduced from 38.8 percent to 10.3. The time devoted to speaking skills would remain approximately the same.
> 4. Communications involving instructions of any kind are most relevant to the vocational student. Instructions of all kinds should become core material for the teaching of reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills. For example, to develop a listening awareness on the part of students, the classroom teacher, it is suggested, should use every opportunity to request feedback from students after giving instructions or assignments.
>
> Listening skills can be implemented further by using listening tapes such as ones provided by the Xerox Effective Listening Program or the Science Research Associates Listen and Read Program. New materials dealing with listening skills are appearing on the market and should be examined for possible usage in the Basic Communications course of study.[5]

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[4]Everett E. Walde, "Implications of the Data to the Communication Skills Curriculum at the District One Technical Institute-Eau Claire" (unpublished Master's Thesis, University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, May, 1970), pp. 22-25.

[5]Roberta P. Lewis, "A Study to Determine the Communication Skill Needs of the Vocational Student in the Basic Communications Curriculum," (unpublished Master's Thesis presented to the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, December, 1971), pp. 20-21.

These studies strongly indicated that perhaps the best method of allowing one to arrive at a basis for a curriculum, that would be responsive to the employer's needs, was the questionnaire/interview method. Therefore, the instrument used in this study was devised containing a listing of competencies associated with the three secretarial areas to be examined. A rating scale enabling the respondent to sort out competencies which were most important to her, and establish a hierarchy of value. Provision was made for the respondent to indicate where the competencies were best learned, along with provisions for comments and additions. An interview procedure was devised that would be the conversational equivalent of the questionnaire.

To restate an assumption made earlier, it seems that by tailoring a secretarial English curriculum around the competencies required on the job, the student as a total person, as well as the student in the employee role, will be best served.

Chapter 2

DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The procedures for implementation of the study were developed and refined under the guidance of Dr. Orville Nelson in an Instrumentation for Research Course. The questionnaire and interview method was selected as the most appropriate means for collecting data related to the problem. It involved construction of questionnaire, a field test and then mailout to a sample population matching our employment radial density. An interview method was also developed to parallel the questionnaire approach.

One of the first steps taken in the preparatory phase of the project was identification of the competencies that fall within the domain of the English instructor at a vocational/technical school, such as Western Wisconsin Technical Institute. The study did not involve a search for these competencies themselves; rather, it involved a survey to find a stratification of importance. For example: is use of elaborate reference materials more essential than use of a dictionary? In addition to seeking a stratification of importance, the projected instrument and interview procedure was conceived with an open-ended capability. That is, provision was made for the respondent or interviewee to add competencies or any other comments he deemed relevant.

The questionnaire (See Appendix C), which was also to be the guide for the interview procedure, was built around a list of 20 competencies, along with provision for addition of competencies by the respondent. A Lickert scale was employed to enable the rater to ascribe a degree of importance to the respective competencies:

Of No Value	Of Some Use	Useful	Fairly Important	Essential
1	2	3	4	5

Where applicable, provision was made for the respondent to enter the percentage of time spent. On all entries the questionnaire allowed the respondent to indicate where the competency was best learned: on job, in school or both. And finally, the respondent was invited to utilize the back of the questionnaire for any comments he might wish to make.

The next step was to field test and refine the instrument. This was accomplished by eliciting the evaluations from a sampling of twelve individuals representative of the populations to which the surveys would be sent. The only negative reactions encountered were those regarding the section dealing with percent of time spent. This required the respondent to ascribe an actual percent of time to each applicable competency. Ten out of the twelve interviewees believed it to be a vague and inhibiting entry, and said that if they were to receive such a questionnaire in the mail, they would leave it blank. It was determined by the advisor and principal investigator, however, that the entry was nevertheless necessary and therefore it was retained.

A map with radial densities (See Appendix A) based on our most recent employment density figures was devised to insure that 50 questionnaires and ten interviews for each of the three subject areas would appropriately sample the area. Respondents were randomly selected without regard to employment of graduates, because to do so would have been inconsistent with the purpose of the study and overlap into the area of student followup surveys. A further subdivision was made with regard to the interviews: They were equally divided between supervisors and those who were supervised.

The questionnaire (See Appendix C) was accompanied by an individually signed letter. Four weeks after the mailout, a followup post card (See Appendix D) was sent thanking those who had responded, and requesting that

those who had not found time to respond to please do so when time permitted. Of the 150 that were sent out, 92 were returned with the following breakdown:

Medical Area	Legal Area	Administrative Area
30	27	35

The procedure for implementing the interview phase began with the compilation of a list of prospective interviewees from the three secretarial areas, medical, legal and administrative. The next step was to call prospective interviewees until 30 interviewees in the respective subject and regional areas were scheduled for interviews. The telephone call procedure (See Appendix E) consisted of identifying the researcher, explaining the nature of the study, requesting a confidential interview of not more than 15 minutes, setting up a time, and finally thanking the prospective interviewee. The next step was to send a letter confirming the interview (See Appendix F). The interview itself consisted of an introduction of the interviewer, a restatement of the nature of the study, and the reason for requesting the interview. The interviewee was reminded that the interview would be strictly confidential. Then, the interviewer proceeded with a series of questions that adhered as closely as possible to the contents of the questionnaire. The interviewer also made an effort to elicit additional comments and suggestions beyond the scope of the contents of the questionnaire for the purpose of insuring that no significant input might be lost. When the interview ended the interviewer thanked the interviewee for his kindness and asked if he would like a summary of the results of the study.

After completion of the interviews, and a return cutoff date of six weeks had been reached for the questionnaires, the two-stage analysis phase could begin. This analysis, which entailed a separate analysis for each of

the areas initially, and then a synthesis into a core of common competencies, is discussed in the balance of this paper.

The last phase of the study involved a transposition of the common competencies into an employment enhancing approach that could be utilized by the curriculum planner as the basis for an English curriculum in the vocational/technical school, and is in the conclusion of this paper.

Chapter 3

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS: MEDICAL, LEGAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE AREA

Medical Area

Rating Scale (1-5)

The 30 Medical Area respondents showed the following ratings for the competencies on the questionnaire. These are listed in order of importance, utilizing the Likert scale for a total point rating.

It will be noticed that the competencies considered to be most important by the questionnaire respondents were of a fundamental nature: use telephone courtesy, use appropriate grammar, comprehend instructions, spell correctly, and use a general vocabulary. This tendency toward the fundamentals, the essentials of communication, both written and oral, will be evident in both the questionnaires and interview results throughout the study. In this table and others, it will be noticed that ability to perform complex tasks such as composing letters and formal and informal reports is considered to be of secondary importance to the "Three R's". As will be further elaborated, the employers and employees questioned wanted the essentials and said that the rest would follow.

	Rating Scale					
Competency	Of No Value 1	Of Some Use 2	Useful 3	Fairly Important 4	Essential 5	Total
Use telephone courtesy	-	-	-	3	27	147
Use appropriate grammar	-	-	-	4	26	146
Comprehend instructions	-	-	-	5	25	145
Spell correctly	-	-	1	5	24	143

Rating Scale (continued)

Competency	Of No Value 1	Of Some Use 2	Useful 3	Fairly Important 4	Essential 5	Total
Use a general vocabulary	-	-	3	9	18	135
Give instructions and directions	-	-	3	9	18	135
Employ technical terminology	-	2	3	6	19	132
Use the dictionary	1	1	3	8	17	129
Write brief messages	-	2	8	7	13	121
Serve as receptionist	2	2	3	9	14	121
Write legibly	-	3	9	3	15	120
Compose letters	-	5	9	9	7	108
Use reference indexes	4	8	5	7	6	93
Compose informal reports	6	9	7	3	3	72
Take meeting minutes	9	9	5	5	2	72
Compose formal reports	9	8	6	3	3	70
Review reference materials	9	10	6	4	1	68
Write abstracts/ summaries	12	5	8	3	-	58
Create graphic aids	6	12	4	4	-	58
Preside at meetings	19	6	1	2	-	42

TABLE I

Percentage Rating

The second part of the questionnaire was an attempt to show the percentage of time spent performing applicable competencies. The following Table shows the percentage ranking of competencies (which could be so rated) and

also indicates the number of respondents who utilized that column on the questionnaire. While the sporadic and sparse utilization of this portion of the questionnaire--coupled with its lack of applicability to all competencies--made it difficult to analyze, there are, nevertheless, some patterns that can be observed. The top two categories involved listening skills and a desirable personality, which indicates an area that should be accorded greater stress in the communication skills curriculum. And of particular interest to the secretarial communication skills instructor is the low rating the competency of composing letters received.

Competency	Percentage Average	Number of Respondents
Comprehend instructions	55	13
Serve as a receptionist	50.7	11
Preside at meetings	41	2
Take meeting minutes	37.2	5
Compose informal reports	32.7	7
Compose formal reports	32.7	7
Give instructions and directions	31.3	14
Create graphic aids	27.6	3
Write abstracts/summaries	22.7	9
Write brief messages	22.2	17
Review reference materials	22.2	8
Use the dictionary	21.2	17
Use reference indexes	20.3	13
Compose letters	17.6	17

TABLE II

Best Learned Columns

The third part of the questionnaire enabled the respondent to indicate whether the competency was best learned on the job, in school or in both places. The chart below shows the responses to this entry arranged from the highest "in school" entry to the lowest. The "Best Learned" columns presented some findings of dual interest when considered in conjunction with the 1-5 rating scale. Those competencies considered to be most important--the fundamentals of English like spelling and grammar--were thought to be best treated in school rather than on the job.

Competency	BEST LEARNED In School	On Job
Write legibly	25	1
Spell correctly	25	1
Use appropriate grammar	25	2
Use a general vocabulary	25	3
Compose letters	23	8
Use the dictionary	23	5
Use reference indexes	21	6
Employ technical terminology	19	13
Use telephone courtesy	18	9
Take meeting minutes	14	8
Write abstracts/summaries	13	7
Review reference materials	11	9
Compose informal reports	11	10
Comprehend instructions	11	15
Write brief messages	11	20
Create graphic aids	10	7

Best Learned Columns (continued)

Competency	BEST LEARNED In School	On Job
Compose formal reports	10	10
Give instructions and directions	10	14
Serve as a receptionist	16	7
Preside at meetings	6	8

TABLE III

Additional Competency Entries: Numbers 21 and 22

With the exception of proofreading ability, which appeared twice, and ability to complete forms, the additional competencies listed were traits that tended more toward the affective domain than the cognitive. These traits were desire, tact and discretion, inclination to ask questions, neatness in appearance, friendliness and kindness, honesty and reliability, quick intelligence, desire for responsibility, friendliness and versatility. The preponderance of additional competencies that lie in the affective domain creates more questions than answers for the English instructor. For example, can and should he try to teach certain attitudes in his classroom, or is the teaching of them the prerogative of the instructors in the major area, the social science core area or in the home?

Two traits which safely lie in the English instructor's domain are proofreading ability and the ability to fill out forms. The former, need for proofreading ability, has turned out to be one of the significant discoveries of this study. The latter, ability to fill out forms, would seem to point toward a more applied approach to writing exercises to the extent of obtaining forms from the major occupational area and making assignments in that content.

Summary of Medical Area Responses

In comparing the Likert scale heirarchy of competencies to the "where learned" hierarchy two trends are apparent and are also evident in the other two areas, plus the interviews for all three: The first trend is that the English competencies deemed most essential on the Likert scale tend toward the essentials of English like grammar and spelling, and a fundamental-oriented approach. The second and related trend is of particular value to the English instructor because it indicates that these fundamental competencies that are regarded as most important are also considered to be best learn-learned in school. It is difficult to make comparisons of the percentile ranking to this comparison because the most fundamental competencies do not lend themselves to a percentile of time utilized. Therefore, the percentile ranking had to be omitted from that ranking, and perhaps more important, because respondent utilization of the percentile ranking was so sporadic and sparse. Since comprehending instructions and serving as a receptionist come first, some correlation with the above mentioned columns might be reasonably inferred. As will be indicated in treatments of the other two areas, there does appear to be a consensus that stress should be placed on the fundamentals of English and that the best place for this to be treated is in school.

Legal Area

Rating Scale (1-5)

The 27 Legal Area respondents showed the following ratings for the competencies on the questionnaire. These are listed in order of importance utilizing the Likert scale for a total point rating. It is interesting to note that except for a slightly different order, the first five competencies on the Likert scale hierarchy made by the Legal Area respondents are the same

five deemed most essential by the Medical Area respondents. Another similarity that may be observed is that more complex tasks in communication such as composing letters and writing informal and formal reports tend to be considered distinctly less important than fundamental competencies like grammar, spelling and vocabulary.

Rating Scale

Competency	Of No Value 1	Of Some Use 2	Useful 3	Fairly Important 4	Essential 5	Total
Comprehend instructions	-	-	-	-	27	135
Use telephone courtesy	-	-	-	1	26	134
Use appropriate grammar	-	-	1	-	26	133
Spell correctly	-	-	1	1	25	132
Use a general vocabulary	-	-	3	3	21	126
Serve as receptionist	-	-	3	3	21	126
Use the dictionary	-	-	1	3	22	125
Write brief messages	-	1	7	5	14	113
Compose letters	-	-	3	13	10	111
Write legibly	-	3	5	6	13	110
Use reference indexes	-	1	13	4	10	107
Give instructions and directions	-	3	5	10	8	101
Employ technical terminology	-	2	2	7	14	96
Review reference materials	-	5	10	5	7	95
Take meeting minutes	2	3	12	3	7	91
Compose informal reports	2	4	13	3	5	89
Write abstracts/ summaries	4	4	8	7	4	84

Rating Scale (continued)

Competency	Of No Value 1	Of Some Use 2	Useful 3	Fairly Important 4	Essential 5	Total
Compose formal reports	2	6	13	3	3	80
Create graphic aids	2	9	11	4	1	74
Preside at meetings	12	6	6	1	2	56

TABLE IV

Percentage Rating

The second part of the questionnaire was an attempt to show the percentage of time spent performing applicable competencies. The following Table shows the percentage ranking of competencies (which could be so rated) and also indicates the number of respondents who utilized that column on the questionnaire. As was the case in the Medical Area, this portion of the questionnaire was not heavily utilized by the respondents, however an interesting commonality with the Medical Area responses emerges: In both cases comprehend instructions and serve as receptionist were given the highest percentages. Of particular interest to the communication skills instructor of legal secretaries is the low ratings the composing of formal and informal reports received.

Competency	Percentage Average	Number of Respondents
Comprehend instructions	82	7
Serve as a receptionist	40.7	7
Give instructions and directions	39	7
Use reference indexes	32.5	6
Compose letters	32	11

Percentage Rating (continued)

Competency	Percentage Average	Number of Respondents
Peview reference materials	30.8	6
Use the dictionary	29	8
Write brief messages	28.1	8
Preside at meetings	27	2
Take meeting minutes	26	5
Write abstracts/ summaries	20	5
Compose informal reports	17	5
Compose formal reports	15	5
Create graphic aids	12.6	6

TABLE V

Best Learned Columns

The third part of the questionnaire enabled the respondent to indicate whether the competency was best learned on the job, in school or in both places. The Table below shows the responses to this entry arranged from the highest "in school" entry to the lowest. The "Best Learned" columns were of distinct interest when compared or contrasted with the Likert 1-5 rating hierarchy. The fundamental English competencies like grammar, spelling and vocabulary which were considered to be the more important competencies tended also to be those considered best learned in school.

Competency	BEST LEARNED In School	On Job
Use appropriate grammar	25	0
Use the dictionary	25	0

Best Learned Columns (continued)

Competency	BEST LEARNED In School	On Job
Write legibly	25	0
Spell correctly	25	0
Use a general vocabulary	24	3
Compose letters	21	7
Write brief messages	19	7
Comprehend instructions	19	8
Use telephone courtesy	19	9
Create graphic aids	17	6
Serve as a receptionist	13	14
Take meeting minutes	11	13
Give instructions and directions	9	16
Preside at meetings	8	12
Compose informal reports	8	16
Write abstracts/summaries	7	17
Compose formal reports	6	16
Use reference indexes	5	19
Review reference materials	5	19
Employ technical terminology	2	22

TABLE VI

Additional Competency Entries: Numbers 21 and 22

As one may expect, the range of additional duties was quite varied. Language competencies included: preparation of legal documents and interviewing of clients. Specialized competencies listed were: filing correctly and

ability to locate files. In addition, there were some housekeeping duties included--the ability to make good coffee and keeping the office neat and clean. Finally, a sense of discretion and confidentiality was indicated by the additional competency--closed mouth. A comment written on the back of one of the questionnaires expressed an attitude that was to be encountered frequently during the interview phase:

> A good legal secretary must have ability to ascertain what material or information is confidential. She must remember always that the employer is "boss" and his instructions are to be followed explicitly even though she may not agree with his procedure. If he wants suggestions from an employee, he will ask for them. Never bore your employer with your personal problems. Remember you are hired to perform a job, and while on the job you are expected to be physically and mentally alert and capable of performing the duties assigned. An employer is not interested in an employee's private life or problems. Learning to accept an employer's idiosyncracies is an essential part of being a good secretary. Where a secretary's duties also involve receptionist duties, courtesy is the most important asset, and must be maintained under all circumstances.

Summary of Legal Area Responses

As one observes the Likert scale hierarchy of competencies in comparison with the "where learned" hierarchy, two things are immediately apparent: First, the competencies deemed most important, tend to be of a fundamental "Three R" nature, like spelling, grammar and vocabulary. Secondly, these same competencies deemed most essential tend to be regarded as best learned in school. There is a tendency this direction in the percentile ranking column. However, the limited number of respondents, coupled with the percentile ranking's only applying to certain competencies, severely limits its usefulness for comparison. Without reiterating specifics contained in the rating columns, it appears that in the legal area there is a consensus that the fundamentals of English are the most essential competencies, and that the development of these competencies is the responsibility of the school not the employer.

Administrative Area

Rating Scale (1-5)

The 35 Administrative Area respondents showed the following ratings for the competencies on the questionnaire. These are listed in order of importance, utilizing the Likert scale for a total point rating. As was the case in the Likert hierarchies for the Medical and Legal Areas, the fundamentals of English were given the greatest importance, with the implementation and integration of these fundamentals into more complex communicative activities being rated as secondary. While the Medical and Legal Areas both had the same "first five" competencies, the Administrative Area differed in its "first five" only in the substitution of "write legibly" for "use general vocabulary."

Rating Scale

Competency	Of No Value 1	Of Some Use 2	Useful 3	Fairly Important 4	Essential 5	Total
Use telephone courtesy	-	-	-	1	32	164
Spell correctly	-	-	-	2	31	163
Comprehend instructions	-	-	-	4	29	161
Use appropriate grammar	-	-	-	4	28	156
Write legibly	-	1	2	9	21	149
Serve as receptionist	1	2	1	10	20	148
Use the dictionary	-	-	5	9	19	146
Use a general vocabulary	-	-	2	11	19	145
Write brief messages	-	-	13	10	11	134
Use reference indexes	2	2	7	13	9	124
Compose letters	-	3	14	6	10	122
Give instructions and directions	1	4	8	9	10	119

Rating Scale (continued)

Competency	Of No Value 1	Of Some Use 2	Useful 3	Fairly Important 4	Essential 5	Total
Employ technical terminology	1	7	10	8	7	112
Take meeting minutes	4	5	10	8	3	101
Review reference materials	2	5	16	8	1	97
Compose informal reports	5	5	16	4	2	89
Create graphic aids	3	6	16	3	2	85
Compose formal reports	8	8	10	4	2	80
Preside at meetings	15	6	4	5	1	64
Write abstracts/ summaries	17	7	4	2	1	56

TABLE VII

Percentage Rating

The second part of the questionnaire was an attempt to show the percentage of time spent performing applicable competencies. The following table shows the percentage ranking of competencies (which could be so rated) and also indicates the number of respondents who utilized that column on the questionnaire. As was true with the other secretarial areas, this portion of the questionnaire was not heavily utilized; however, granting this disadvantage, along with the problem of the lack of the percentage rating's applicability to several areas, there does nevertheless emerge an interesting outcome: the two competencies that were given the highest rating for the Administrative area were the "top two" in importance in the Medical and Legal Areas.

Competency	Percentage Average	Number of Respondents
Serve as a receptionist	48.3	18
Comprehend instructions	46.1	13
Write abstracts/ summaries	21.6	5
Give instructions and directions	20.9	12
Use the dictionary	20.1	13
Review reference materials	19.4	11
Use reference indexes	18	16
Compose letters	17.9	19
Preside at meetings	17.6	5
Write brief messages	16.4	20
Take meeting minutes	15.8	7
Compose formal reports	14.6	9
Compose informal reports	13.1	11
Create graphic aids	12.2	10

TABLE VIII

Best Learned Columns

The third part of the questionnaire enabled the respondent to indicate whether the competency was best learned on the job, in school or in both places. The table below shows the responses to this entry arranged from the highest "in school" entry to the lowest. The competencies considered to be best learned in school tended to be the competencies regarded as most important on the Likert rating. This same rough correlation was present in the other two areas.

Competency	BEST LEARNED In School	On Job
Write legibly	31	0
Spell correctly	31	0
Use appropriate grammar	31	1
Use the dictionary	31	1
Use a general vocabulary	27	5
Compose letters	24	8
Use telephone courtesy	24	9
Take meeting minutes	19	9
Comprehend instructions	19	14
Serve as a receptionist	16	23
Write brief messages	15	17
Use reference indexes	15	17
Create graphic aids	14	8
Compose informal reports	13	15
Preside at meetings	12	9
Write abstracts/summaries	12	12
Give instructions and directions	12	20
Review reference material	11	19
Compose formal reports	10	15
Employ technical terminology	5	27

TABLE IX

Additional Competency Entries: Numbers 21 and 22

Additional competencies listed by the Administrative Area respondents were predominantly affective domain oriented. Reading is the one entry listed that could safely be placed in the English area. The other entry that was

not primarily an effective trait was record keeping. The remainder were: pleasant personality, pleasant outgoing personality, ability to work with and through people, personal neatness, ability to adjust to variable work load, ability to train and supervise others, politeness, and ability to make decisions.

As was discussed in the similar portion of the Medical Area findings, the English instructor contemplating these results is confronted with the bewildering question of how far he can or should venture into the realm of attitude development and modification. This study will not presume to arrive at a specific answer, but will try to formulate pertinent questions about this problem which will become more apparent in the interview analyses and summaries.

Summary of Administrative Area Responses

As was true in the Medical and Legal Areas, a definite comparison can be made between the Likert scale hierarchy of competencies and the "where learned" hierarchy--that is, the competencies which are deemed most important, the fundamentals, are also considered to be best learned in school. Comparing the percentile rankings, of course, was as difficult in this area as it was in the others because of the problem of dealing with unlikes and the limited number of responses. It is of distinct interest, however, that "comprehending instructions" was a close second in the Administrative Area percentage ranking and was considered the most important in the percentage rankings of the other two areas. This would seem to indicate a significant need for the English instructor to instill in his students an awareness of the communication process generally, and a specific grasp of essentials of critical and retentive listening.

Analysis and Summary of Medical Area Interviews

The Medical Secretarial Interviewees were randomly selected from their respective zones on the radial density map (See Appendix A) and there was roughly an even breakdown between actual secretarial personnel and supervisory personnel. This breakdown was attempted in the interviewee selection in the other two secretarial areas also. The Medical Secretarial Interviewees' views on the competencies required of a secretary were quite similar to those of their counterparts who responded to the questionnaires. Among the desired competencies that clearly lie within the domain of the English instructor there was a preponderance of the fundamental skills. The competencies mentioned in the interviews and the numbers of interviewees who mentioned them follow: grammar (5), spelling (4), composition of letters (4), telephone courtesy (4), punctuation (3), listening (2), ability to pull the essentials (2), take meeting minutes (2), use the dictionary (2), understanding of subject/verb agreement, ability to use capitalization, speed reading, sentence structure, interpretation, ability to write abstracts, and ability to write summaries.

Skills mentioned that tended more toward the specialized secretarial area training were: Knowledge of medical terminology, ability to take dictation, records management, and knowledge of appropriate format.

Affective domain competencies that were mentioned were: personal neatness, self-discipline, avoidance of overconfidence, ability to comprehend instructions, ability to transfer principles, capacity for retention, willingness to ask questions, good personal habits, punctuality, good work habits, ability to make a good first impression, ability to keep from getting overinvolved, willingness to maintain the objectives of the agency, and maintenance of appropriate appearance.

The interviewees held views similar to those of the respondents. They stressed fundamentals of English, and the recurring lexicon of traditional work virtues was to be recited in some form in every interview. That is, expressions like: "an honest day's work for an honest day's pay", "keeping busy", "realizing that time is money" and various other slogan-like pleas for industriousness and a sense of values.

Analysis and Summary of Legal Area Interviews

The Legal Secretarial Interviewees mentioned only two competencies that fell within the domain of training in the specialized area: ability to take accurate dictation and use of technical terminology.

English competencies mentioned in the interviews and the number of interviewees who mentioned them follow: spelling (6), punctuation (6), grammar (5), proofreading (4), telephone courtesy (3), compose letters (3), vocabulary development (3), receptionist ability (2), homonym error avoidance, sentence structure, letter paragraphing, creative writing, ability to put personal touch in writing, ability to write legibly, ability to review reference materials, message composition and ability to take notes on instructions.

Competencies lying in the affective domain were: neat appearance, profitable time utilization, good work attitude, courtesy, ability to comprehend instructions, sense of humor, sense of ridiculous, ability to judge importance and initiative.

The Legal Area Interviewees showed a desire to stress two areas--the fundamentals of English like grammar and spelling, and the work ethic as expressed by phrases like "willingness to work" and "staying busy". There was one interesting sub area stress--that of proofreading and an extreme consciousness of the absolute correctness of what is written and an absolute correspondence between what is intended to be communicated and that which is communicated.

Analysis and Summary of Administrative Area Interviews

Only one of the competencies mentioned by the Administrative Area Interviewees seemed separable from the English and affective domain areas; that competency being, ability to manage appointment schedules. Except for that competency, which seemed to belong in the actual secretarial area, the others divided between the two areas already mentioned.

English competencies mentioned in the interviews, and the numbers of interviewees who mentioned them, follow: grammar (5), spelling (4), telephone courtesty (4), compose letters (2), receptionist ability (2), proofreading, punctuation, listening, knowledge of parliamentary procedure, minute taking ability, news release writing and use of dictionary.

Affective domain competencies seemed to begin and end with the same trait, responsibility, which was mentioned by name twice, but was continually stressed in one form or another as the following list of desired competencies will indicate; willingness to put in a full day's work, proper image, cheerful manner, industriousness (2), initiative, diplomacy, flexibility in personal relations, ability to develop flow procedures, a work ethic, diplomacy, good public relations, comprehend instructions, good "housekeeping" habits, hospitality, poise, courtesy, good personality and ability to make first impressions.

The patterns which began with the questionnaire data seem to have continued through the interviews also: in the areas that belong to the English instructor, there is a strong consensus that indicates that the "Three R" essentials of English should receive the most stress. And then too, there is the affective domain problem first mentioned in the analysis of the 21 and 22 items of the Questionnaire: the traditional work ethic attitude is

continually stressed by the respondent or interviewee, but whose prerogative is it to stress it?

Summary of Chapter 3

The questionnaires and interviews did not unearth significant omissions in the English curriculum of vocational/technical schools (with the exception of the need for proofreading stress), however they did present a distinct hierarchy of importance for those who plan courses aimed directly at employability. As was stated in Chapter III, Design and Methodology, the study did not involve a search for the competencies, but rather a stratification of importance or weighting, and the pattern is distinctly observable in the data. Among the competencies that lie within the English or communication skills domain, the absolute fundamentals (grammar, spelling and vocabulary) were almost always considered to be the most essential. Those competencies were invariably considered to be the responsibility of the educator, not the employer. The extreme regard for the "Three R" or fundamental-oriented approach to English was probably the most startling result of the study.

A result of the study that is somewhat less startling was the strongly expressed desire for a return to what might best be called the work ethic. As was true with the fundamental grammar area, the work ethic was expected to be a desired trait--however tenuous its relationship to English, but the intensity and frequency of its advocacy was a definite surprise.

Summarizing the results of the chapter: the employer wants a willing and conscientious worker who is well grounded in the fundamentals of English, and with this attitudinal basis along with basic competency in communication, there should be little difficulty in adapting the employee to the more complex requirements of the job.

These results present a complex problem for the English instructor at the post-secondary level: he is expected to do two things with his students which traditionally don't belong within his area of responsibility. He is supposed to teach fundamental English--a function associated with grade school and high school; and he is supposed to instill a constructive attitude toward work, which out-of-school environment and experience is expected to provide. This problem will be elaborated further in the following Chapter.

Chapter 4

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

As was stated in the Summary for Chapter III, the overall results of both the questionnaires and interviews indicate an overwhelming desire on the part of the employer for secretaries who are well grounded in the fundamentals of English like grammar, spelling and vocabulary; and the more complex and specific duties of the particular job could be then taught by the employer with little difficulty. The questionnaires and interviews also indicated that the employer regarded the teaching of these fundamentals as being the primary responsibility of the educator.

In addition to a desire for school-taught fundamentals of English a strong desire was expressed by most respondents for that collection of attitudes known as the "work ethic." This latter trait, which received so much attention, was certainly the most surprising, and possibly the most valuable result of this study.

Conclusions

The study overall, and the interviews in particular, seemed to indicate that the tendency in English education has been in a direction pleasing to today's social scientist and current social theory with its emphasis on making school "fun" and avoiding both stress on memory, and stress on stress itself. However that direction which strikes the social theorist as being acceptable, seems to be almost 180 degrees off from what the employer wants. What the social theorist regards as trauma-reducing, the employer regards as mediocrity

producing. What the social theorist regards as an elimination of stress, the employer regards as a postponement of reality.

A very fundamental question arises for the educator: are we to tailor our courses to, and follow the approach deemed appropriate by theorists within education? Or are we to tailor our courses to, and develop our approaches to fit the needs of employers in the world of work? Perhaps the long term happiness and satisfaction derived from successful competition in the world of work is more desirable than the short term happiness of a stress-free, non-competitive educational interlude.

Recommendations

The "Three R" problem could perhaps best be attacked by diagnostic pre-testing at the beginning of the required English core to determine the range of fundamental English abilities posessed by individuals. If an extreme disparity were present, the next problem would be to arrange for a workable alternative to the lock-step conduct of a class which has to aim at a median that loses the lower ability students, and bores those of higher ability.

A workable alternative could be a curriculum based on mastry packages with a discrete flexibility built in to the performance phase which could enable the instructor to channel those with fundamental English problems to work with personnel the school's remedial facilities--be they adult basic education or learning labs. Autotutorial programs would be of particular value for those with fundamental problems.

To keep the mastry package production from being a monotonous cycle, resource speakers and clearly relevant lectures could be interspersed throughout the course. Utilizing resource speakers from the world of work, both employers and employees, would enable the instructor to convey the importance

of the "work ethic" as well as the need for mastry of fundamental English competencies.

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Questionnaires

Zones	I	II	III
Medical	35	10	5
Legal	35	10	5

Interviews

Zones	I	II
Medical	6	4
Legal	6	4

WESTERN WISCONSIN TECHNICAL INSTITUTE
6th and Vine Streets
LA CROSSE, WISCONSIN
54601

CHARLES G. RICHARDSON
District Director

May we ask your help?

The English Department at Western Wisconsin Technical Institute would like to know the communication skills you consider essential in a secretary. By filling out this questionnaire, you can help us greatly in our effort to ensure the relevance of our course content and furnish you, the employer, with the most competent graduate possible.

Replies will be handled in a strictly confidential manner.

If you would like a copy of the results of the study, please indicate this at the top of the questionnaire.

Sincerely yours,

David M. Radloff

David M. Radloff
Instructor

DMR:nf

Enclosures: questionnaire
envelope

Western Wisconsin
Technical Institute
La Crosse
DMR Gen Ed Dept 6/7

QUESTIONNAIRE

Name _____

Type of job used as basis for this response: _____

SECRETARIAL AREA INVOLVED:
Check one
Medical..... _____
Legal..... _____
Administrative..... _____

Please rate each of these competencies according to the rating scale by checking the box under t appropriate number. At the right of the scale check one or both boxes to indicate where the com petency is best learned. Where applicable, indicate the percentage of time spent at this task:

COMPETENCIES	LEVEL OF IMPORTANCE							
	Of No Value 1	Of Some Use 2	Useful 3	Fairly Important 4	Essential 5	APPROXIMATE PERCENTAGE OF TIME	BEST LEARNED On Job	BEST LEARNED In School
WRITTEN COMPETENCIES Ability to:								
1. Compose letters	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	___%	☐	☐
2. Use appropriate grammar	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐		☐	☐
3. Write brief messages	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	___%	☐	☐
4. Use the dictionary	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	___%	☐	☐
5. Write legibly	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐		☐	☐
6. Spell correctly	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐		☐	☐
7. Use a general vocabulary	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐		☐	☐
8. Use indexes to locate reference materials	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	___%	☐	☐
9. Review reference materials	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	___%	☐	☐
10. Employ technical terminology	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐		☐	☐
11. Write abstracts/summaries	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	___%	☐	☐
12. Compose informal reports	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	___%	☐	☐
13. Compose formal reports	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	___%	☐	☐
14. Take meeting minutes	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	___%	☐	☐
ORAL COMPETENCIES Ability to:								
15. Give instructions and directions	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	___%	☐	☐
16. Use telephone courtesy	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐		☐	☐
17. Comprehend instructions	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	___%	☐	☐
18. Serve as a receptionist	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	___%	☐	☐
19. Preside at meetings	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	___%	☐	☐

MISCELLANEOUS COMPETENCIES

Ability to:

20. Create graphic aids i.e., charts, tables, etc.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	___%	☐	☐
21. Other _____	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	___%	☐	☐
22. Other _____	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	___%	☐	☐

Please use the back of this sheet for any comments you might wish to make.

July 26, 1972

HELLO!

I want to thank all of you who were kind enough to fill out the secretarial competencies questionnaire.

Those of you who requested copies of the results of the study will receive them this fall.

May I ask those of you who didn't find time to complete it, to fill it out when time does permit.

Thank you.

Dave Radloff

Dave Radloff
Instructor, W.W.T.I.

APPENDIX D

TELEPHONE CALL PROCEDURE

Name and Address of Prospect _____

_____

☐ 1. My name is Dave Radloff; I'm an English Instructor at W.W.T.I., and I'm calling with regard to an English Department Survey to determine the communication skills needed by secretaries.

☐ 2. This survey is being conducted to insure the relevancy of our Business English course content.

☐ 3. Would it be possible for you to allow me an interview of no longer than fifteen minutes to get your views on communication skills needed by secretaries? Your comments would be regarded as strictly confidential.

☐ 4. Yes No

☐ 5. During which of the following times would an interview be most convenient for you?

Time _____ Place _____

☐ 6. Thank you so very much for your kindness and cooperation.

☐ 7. Confirmation letter sent.

☐ 8. Interview logged into schedule.

APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW CONFIRMATION LETTER

Dear _____

I'm writing to confirm the interview appointment you granted me during our telephone conversation of April 12 for 1:15-1:30 on Tuesday, April 25.

It will be a pleasure to walk with you and learn your views on the communication skills necessary in a secretary.

Yours cordially,

David M. Radloff
Instructor

APPENDIX F

INTERVIEW PROCEDURE

1. First, I'll assume that initially I will have had the opportunity to introduce myself to the secretary or receptionist and remind her of my interview appointment.

2. Then with the interviewee: "I'm Dave Radloff from W.W.T.I., and I'm here to ask your views on the communication skills needed in the secretary. I really appreciate your sparing of this time to talk to me."

3. "I'd like to ask a series of questions about the importance of various communication skills competencies required of the secretary, and then ask for any additional categories you might wish to add. I will regard anything you say as absolutely confidential."

4. Then I would proceed down the list of competencies in a flexible and varied pattern of conversation that would hopefully disguise the fact that we were using a checklist. I would do this for several reasons, among them--avoidance of monotony, and the danger of giving off an aura of condescension.

5. I would have a reduced size instrument made that I would rapidly score as the person spoke. The jumping from numerical hierarchy to percent to "where learned" will have to be ironed out in a few test interviews before the real ones begin. As mentioned before, the first ten interviewees will be asked to evaluate the instrument, which will not be shown them until the interview is over.

6. As the interview ended, I would again thank the interviewee for his kindness and help.